



Environmental Fact Sheet

EPA To Develop Guidance on The Use of the Terms "Recycled" and "Recyclable" in Product Labeling and Advertising

Recognizing the potential for accurate marketing claims to benefit the environment, and the confusion caused by inconsistent use of environmental marketing terms, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) aims to provide voluntary guidance on specific terms and their use to help educate consumers and advise marketers. The first terms addressed will be related to recycling solid waste materials.

As a result of the guidance, use of recycled materials should increase as consumer confidence in the information provided by marketers increases.

Background

As the American public has come to understand that they may contribute unknowingly to national or global environmental problems, the public has increasingly expressed a desire to help protect the environment. Many consumers demonstrate a growing willingness to change their buying habits in ways that will reduce environmental problems, and they continue to seek out products they believe are more beneficial for the environment. As a result, a number of manufacturers are promoting the environmental attributes of their products.

The lack of commonly understood meanings for terms used in environmental marketing claims has confused consumers and manufacturers. The same claims are sometimes used by different manufacturers and consumers to mean different things. In addition, some labels promote a single attribute of a product, such as "recycled," while others make more generalized or vague claims, such as "safe for the environment" or "environmentally friendly."

Recognizing the lack of uniform definitions for environmental marketing terms, EPA—working with other federal agencies—intends to provide guidance on those terms and on their use to help educate consumers and advise marketers. The first terms addressed will be related to recycling solid waste materials.

Action

EPA is considering a number of options regarding voluntary national guidance for use in product labeling and advertising to promote the use of recycled and recyclable materials. Via a notice in the *Federal Register*, the Agency is requesting comment and holding a public meeting on the use of specific terms often used in promoting recycled products and recyclable materials.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) held hearings in July 1991 to determine whether to develop enforceable guidelines covering the use of environmental marketing claims. In the interest of providing uniform guidance, if FTC decides to develop guidelines in the future, EPA will share with them information collected from this action. If FTC decides not to develop guidelines, EPA will publish final recommendations as guidance to industry and consumers.

Options for "Recycled Content" and "Recyclable" Marketing Claims

The notice discusses three options for "recycled content" claims and four options for "recyclable" claims.

Recycled Content

The options are that:

- marketers clearly and prominently state the percentage of recycled content by weight of recycled materials in the product;
- marketers promote recycled content only when a product meets a specified minimum percentage of recycled material; or
- marketers use a combination of the above methods.

EPA prefers the first option.

Recyclable

The options are that:

- marketers promote the recyclability of a product only when the product is recycled at a certain minimum percentage nationally and the product prominently discloses the national recovery rate for the material or product.
- marketers use only qualified claims that do not lead consumers to assume that the product is recyclable everywhere and that provide consumers with information that helps them recycle the material.

- marketers use a combination of qualified claims and disclosure of the national recycling rate.
- marketers promote the recyclability of a product only when the product is recycled at a certain minimum percentage nationally, and that they use qualified claims and disclose the national recycling rate of the product.

EPA's preferred option is that marketers use a combination of qualified claims and disclosure of the national recycling rate to advertise the recyclability of products.

Options for Use of the Recycling Emblem

The familiar recycling emblem (three chasing arrows) is commonly used by marketers on products to show both recyclability and recycled content. In some cases, it is used in conjunction with more generalized claims, like "environmentally friendly." The Agency feels more guidance on the proper use of the emblem is needed to increase the effectiveness of its use for recycling, and to ensure consumers understand its meaning. Three options for using the recycling emblem are discussed:

- to limit the use of the emblem to claims regarding the use of recycled content and recyclability;
- to follow the American Paper Institute's guidance that uses different versions of the emblem for recycled content and for recyclable material; or
- to label the recycling emblem to indicate whether the product contains recycled content or is recyclable or both.

The Agency prefers the first and last options, together.

Definitions

The notice proposes definitions for certain recycling terms to serve as guidance for marketers and consumers. Along with the other terms, it defines:

Recycled Content as the portion of a material's or product's weight that is composed of pre- and post-consumer materials.

Recyclables as products or materials that can be recovered from or otherwise diverted from the solid waste stream for the purpose of recycling.

The Agency is accepting comment on this notice for 90 days following publication in the *Federal Register*. A public meeting will be held in Washington, D.C. on November 13-14, 1991.

Contact

For additional information or to order a copy of the *Federal Register* notice, contact the RCRA Hotline, Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. EST. The national, toll-free number is (800) 424-9346; TDD (800) 553-7672 (hearing impaired); in Washington, D.C., the number is (703) 920-9810, TDD (703) 486-3323.

Copies of documents applicable to this guidance may be obtained by writing: RCRA Information Center (RIC), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste (OS-305), 401 M Street SW, Washington, D.C. 20460.